

FACT SHEET:

Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law—



What you should know.

Maryland's new lawn fertilizer law is designed to protect the Chesapeake Bay from excess nutrients entering its waters from a variety of urban sources, including golf courses, parks, recreation areas, athletic fields, businesses and hundreds of thousands of suburban and urban lawns.

Nutrients—primarily nitrogen and phosphorus—are key ingredients in lawn fertilizer. When it rains, excess nutrients can wash off the land and into the streams and rivers that feed the Chesapeake Bay. Once in our waterways, excess fertilizers contribute to the growth of algae blooms that block sunlight from reaching Bay grasses, rob the water of oxygen and threaten underwater life.

Lawn fertilizer now accounts for approximately 44 percent of the fertilizer sold in Maryland. While certain restrictions on fertilizer use have been in place for farmers since 2001, additional stakeholder involvement is needed if Maryland is to meet new nutrient reduction goals outlined in its Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) to restore the Bay. Maryland's new lawn fertilizer law affects fertilizer manufacturers and distributors, lawn care professionals and homeowners.



New phased-in restrictions affect all lawn fertilizer products sold and distributed in Maryland. The changes are aimed at helping lawn care professionals and homeowners maintain healthy lawns without applying unnecessary amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus.

Specifically, the law:

- ✎ Requires lawn fertilizer products sold in Maryland to include label directions to ensure that no more than 0.9 pounds of total nitrogen is applied per 1,000 square feet, per application. At least 20 percent of this nitrogen must be in a slow release form. The maximum amount of water soluble nitrogen in lawn fertilizer products applied per 1,000 square feet is capped at 0.7 pounds per application. *Effective October 1, 2013.*
- ✎ Prohibits lawn fertilizer products from containing phosphorus with certain exceptions for specially labeled starter fertilizer and organic fertilizer products. *Effective October 1, 2013.*
- ✎ Prohibits labeling lawn fertilizer as a de-icer. *Effective October 1, 2013.*
- ✎ Requires lawn fertilizer products to contain the following statement: *“Do not apply near water, storm drains or drainage ditches. Do not apply if heavy rain is expected. Apply this product only to your lawn and sweep any product that lands on the driveway, sidewalk, or street, back onto your lawn.”* *Effective October 1, 2011.*

Enforcement Authority and More Information

Maryland Department of Agriculture

State Chemist Section

50 Harry S. Truman Parkway

Annapolis, MD 21401

410.841.2721

Larger lawn care service providers are currently required to take soil tests for clients, follow University of Maryland fertilizer recommendations and keep records of fertilizer applications. *Beginning October 1, 2013*, all lawn care professionals must be certified in order to apply fertilizer in Maryland. The rules apply to professionals for hire as well as individuals responsible for turf management at golf courses, public parks, airports, athletic fields, businesses, cemeteries and other nonagricultural properties.

Training

University of Maryland Extension (UME) is developing a training manual to prepare individuals to take the certification exam. Training classes will be available fall 2012. Check **www.mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer** for updates.

Certification

Individuals and companies hired to apply fertilizers must be certified by MDA or work under the direct supervision of an individual who is certified. MDA will offer fertilizer applicator certification exams beginning fall 2012 and will publish a list of certified professional fertilizer applicators on its website.

Licensing

Licenses will be required for all businesses engaged in commercial fertilizer applications. Each business will be required to employ at least one certified fertilizer applicator. Licenses to qualifying firms will be available beginning fall 2012.



Fertilizer Application Restrictions

- ✂️ Lawn care professionals are prohibited from applying lawn fertilizer to impervious surfaces or frozen ground.
- ✂️ No fertilizer applications within 15 feet of waterways. This setback is reduced to 10 feet if a drop spreader, rotary spreader with deflector or targeted spray liquid is used to apply the fertilizer.
- ✂️ No lawn fertilizer may be applied between December 1 and March 1. From November 16 through December 1 only water soluble nitrogen (*no slow release*) may be applied to lawns at a maximum rate of ½ pound per 1,000 square feet.
- ✂️ Professionals must apply fertilizer using University of Maryland recommendations.
- ✂️ Soil tests must be taken for each new customer and once every three years thereafter.
- ✂️ A single application may not exceed 0.9 pounds total nitrogen per 1,000 square feet and 0.7 pounds of soluble nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, except when using enhanced efficiency fertilizer.
- ✂️ Professional applicators may continue to apply natural organic or organic products containing phosphorus, but beginning October 1, 2013, each application may not exceed 0.25 pounds of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet with an annual maximum of 0.5 pounds of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet. *These products may not be applied when soils test at "optimum to excessive" for phosphorus levels.*
- ✂️ Enhanced efficiency controlled release products may be applied at no more than 2.5 pounds per year, with a maximum monthly release rate of 0.7 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

Penalties

Violators are subject to civil penalties of up to \$1,000 for the first violation and \$2,000 for each subsequent violation.

Enforcement Authority and More Information

Maryland Department of Agriculture

Nutrient Management Program

50 Harry S. Truman Parkway

Annapolis, MD 21401

410.841.5959

Beginning October 1, 2013, homeowners and do-it-yourselfers will be required to follow University of Maryland recommendations when fertilizing lawns. Mandatory restrictions, similar to those imposed for lawn care professionals, apply:

- ✦ Homeowners must follow University of Maryland fertilizer recommendations when applying nitrogen to lawns.
- ✦ A single application may not exceed 0.9 pounds total nitrogen per 1,000 square feet and 0.7 pounds of soluble nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Visit **www.hgic.umd.edu** for seasonal and yearly recommendations.
- ✦ Homeowners are prohibited from applying fertilizer to sidewalks, driveways or other impervious surfaces. Any product that lands on these surfaces must be swept back onto lawns.
- ✦ No fertilizer applications within 15 feet of waterways. This setback is reduced to 10 feet if a drop spreader, rotary spreader with deflector or targeted spray liquid is used to apply fertilizer.
- ✦ No lawn fertilizer may be applied between November 15 and March 1 and when the ground is frozen.
- ✦ Fertilizers may not be used to de-ice walkways and driveways.
- ✦ Do not fertilize if heavy rain is predicted.
- ✦ Phosphorus may only be applied to lawns when indicated by soil test results or when the homeowner is establishing, patching or renovating a lawn.

Enforcement Authority and More Information

A county, municipality or MDA may enforce these requirements for homeowners. This law pre-empts any existing local ordinances.

Maryland Department of Agriculture
Nutrient Management Program
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
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Homeowner Resources

Soil Sample Information

University of Maryland Home and
Garden Information Center

www.hgic.umd.edu/content/SoilTesting.cfm

Backyard Actions for a Cleaner Chesapeake Bay

Maryland Department of Agriculture and University of
Maryland Home and Garden Information Center

www.mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer



Maryland Department of Agriculture

50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401

www.mda.maryland.gov



Financial assistance provided by the Coastal Zone Management
Act of 1972, as amended, administered by the Office of Ocean and
Coastal Resource Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration (NOAA).



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